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AUTHOR Ziv, Nina Dansky
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ABSTRACT

A study exploring the effects of teacher comments on student compositions sought to identify specific, effective teacher responses in order to begin the development of a model of teacher intervention during the writing process. Because a review of the literature revealed that previous studies on the subject had been inconclusive regarding the effect of particular comments on student writing, the case study method was used to explore the effect of comments on the writing of four college freshmen enrolled in a required, year-long, expository writing course. Teacher comments were identified as two major types, explicit and implicit, with each type operating at four levels--structural, conceptual, lexical, and sequential. Students' reactions to comments on their papers were tape recorded and categorized, and their actions in rewriting their final drafts were classified. Patterns of student responses and reactions to particular categories of comments were charted and analyzed. Results indicated that students responded favorably to explicit comments on conceptual and structural levels and unfavorably to implicit comments on lexical and sentential levels. The findings suggest that teachers should try to write comments in a positive and empathic manner, to be aware of the intentions of student writers, ascertain the effects of their comments, and move away from the role of evaluator and toward establishing a dialogue with their student writers. (AEA)

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Nina Dansky Ziv
48 Ball Terrace
Maplewood, N.J. 07040
(201) 762-2922

Position: Teaching Fellow
at New York University

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The Effect of Teacher Comments on the Writing of Four College Freshmen

One of the problems that English teachers have always been concerned with is how to help their students to become better writers. Teachers have usually relied on prescriptive rhetoric texts and handbooks as guides and have communicated the rules prescribed by these texts to their students through a variety of methods. While lectures and class discussions about good writing have their place in the composition classroom, a more direct method of affecting student writing performance is that of writing comments on student papers.

Research has shown that teachers have different priorities when they respond to student writing. Thus the results of some studies have indicated that teachers respond primarily to the mechanics, grammar, usage, and vocabulary of a paper. (Kline, 1973; Harris, 1977; Searle & Dillon, 1980) In contrast to these studies, Freedman (1978) found that teachers were more concerned with content and organization than with mechanical errors. Though the emphasis of their responses may vary, most teachers comment on the finished products of student writing and consider these comments to be evaluations of their students' work. In such a model of teacher response, the teacher acts as a judge who grades her students' papers and writes comments suggesting how her students can "fix up" their essays. When she responds in this manner, she assumes that her students will learn what "good writing" is from her comments and thereby improve in future papers. Students who receive such comments on their papers may read them; however, they do

not write subsequent drafts in which they can act upon them and thus the improvement desired by their teachers rarely occurs. Along with not being able to react to teacher comments immediately, students may not see the need to respond to these comments because they are evaluations of their work and not the responses of an interested adult reader.

It is evident that teacher responses on the final products of student writing may not be reaching their goals in helping students to improve their writing. Indeed, Pianko (1979) wrote that if teachers are to effect a positive change in students' written products, they must change their focus from evaluating and correcting finished papers to helping students expand and elaborate on the stages of their composing processes. Researchers who have studied the various stages of the composing process (Emig, 1971; Stallard, 1972; Graves, 1975; Perl, 1978) have identified revision as a stage of the process which is of vital importance. Murray (1978) defined revision as what the writer does after a draft is completed in order to understand and communicate what has begun to appear on the written page. The writer reads to alter and develop what has been written and eventually after several drafts, develops a meaning which can be communicated to the reader.

Though revision is a major aspect of the writing process and one that students should engage in when writing their compositions, teachers frequently equate revision with what Murray (1978) called its external aspect, i.e., what writers do to communicate what they have found to a specific audience. In doing external revision, writers edit, proofread, and use the various conventions of form and language to put the finishing touches on their pieces of writing. Thus Beach (1976) found that if

teachers evaluated any drafts, their comments usually concerned matters of form and language. In her work on the revision process, Sommers (1978) compared the writing of college freshmen with that of experienced adult writers and found that adult writers were concerned with revising the composition as a whole and had developed their own revision criteria, while student writers were more concerned with changes on the word or phrase level, and were using specific criteria they had learned from teachers or textbooks.

If teachers are to help their students to revise their papers on the conceptual and structural level as well as on the lexical and sentential levels then they need a model for commenting on student papers. Yet no such model has been established for the few studies that have been done on the effects of teacher response during the writing process have yielded inconclusive results. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of teacher comments on successive drafts of student compositions in order to generate hypotheses concerning effective kinds of responses and thus begin to develop a model of teacher intervention during the writing process.

Related Literature

The research on teacher response has been primarily concerned with determining the effects that different types of responses have on the overall quality of student writing and on student attitudes toward writing. Several researchers, for example, compared the effects of comments which praise student writing with those comments which criticize such

writing (Taylor & Hoedt, 1966; Seidman, 1967; Clarke, 1969), and found that one type of comment is no more effective than another in helping students to write better compositions. Other studies in which various methods of commenting were compared also failed to yield any conclusive evidence about the kinds of responses which would be most helpful for student writers. (Bata, 1972; Wolter, 1975; Maranzo and Arthurs, 1977) The lack of significant conclusions in these studies may have been due to inadequate research designs. However, they may have also been the result of basing these designs on a model of teacher response in which comments only appeared on student papers that were already completed and such feedback, not integrally built into the writing process is of questionable value.

Yet studies on the effect of teacher responses during the writing process are rare. Buxton (1958) studied the writing development of two groups of college freshmen over the course of an entire year. One group received no grades on their papers and no comments except for a few general ones at the end of their papers suggesting ways in which they might improve their future essays. When their papers were returned, these students were told to look at the comments and not to revise their papers in any way. A second experimental group received extensive marginal and interlinear comments, final comments suggesting ways they could improve their papers, and two grades reflecting their teachers' assessments of the content and "accuracy" of their papers. These students received their annotated papers back and revised them during a class period while teachers went from student to student and helped them. Buxton reported significant differences between the revision and writing

groups leading him to conclude that college freshmen whose writing is criticized and who revise in light of this criticism, can improve their writing more than students who receive a few general suggestions but do not revise. While Buxton's results appear to be significant, the comments were only part of the treatment variable and thus it was impossible to know what their relative influence was on student writing improvement.

Kelley (1973) investigated the effects of two types of responses on student writing. In her study, one class of 28 twelfth graders were randomly divided into two groups; one group received clarifying responses on the rough drafts of their essays and the other group received directive responses. Kelley defined the clarifying response as "...a question or series of questions designed to help the student evaluate the nature of his ideas and consider alternatives in relationship to the writing skills he is expected to demonstrate in his writing," (p. 141) and the directive response as "...a written comment which gives a specific direction to the student regarding improvement of the writing skills which he is expected to demonstrate in his writing." (p. 141) During the experiment, the classroom teacher wrote either clarifying or directive comments on each student's papers concerning the ideas, wording, flavor, and organization, and used a mechanics chart to indicate to the student the frequency of such mechanical errors as spelling and punctuation. After the appropriate comments were written, the students revised their papers during two class periods and then returned them to their teacher. Kelley found that while neither type of response significantly influenced the amount of growth in writing performance of students on between draft revisions, there was a strong indication that "...the

clarifying response may be more effective than the directive response for expository essays." (p. 116) Though Kelley's conclusions indicate that one type of response may help students to improve their writing more than another, her categories of commenting were very general and no attempt was made to ascertain how particular comments within these categories affected specific aspects of student writing.

In addition to the Buxton and Kelley studies, some research has focused on whether teacher corrections between drafts and subsequent revisions by students have had any effect on the elimination of mechanical errors in student writing. (Fellows, 1936; Arnold, 1964) King (1970) studied the effects of three different types of comments on specific errors frequently made by students in their writing and found that students understood teacher corrections less often than comments which named the error or stated the rule that the student had violated. King also began to divide comments into well-defined categories instead of the general categories of previous studies. However, like her predecessors, she made no attempt to investigate how specific teacher responses affected student writing performance. It is evident that research done in the area of teacher response to student writing has provided few answers and that further research needs to be undertaken in order to find out how teachers can best help their students during the writing process.

Procedures

Selection of Participants

Since little research had been done on the effect of particular

comments on student writing, I used the case study method to explore the effect of my comments on the writing of four college freshmen. The research participants were four students enrolled in a regular section of the New York University Expository Writing Program. All entering freshmen are required to take two semesters of Expository Writing and are randomly assigned to a section of the course. Sections of the Writing Program are limited to fifteen students and are taught by graduate students or faculty members from NYU.

During the Fall semester of the 1979-1980 academic year, I taught two regular sections of Expository Writing. At the beginning of the semester, I asked all my students to write an essay on a topic of their choice and on the basis of this first paper, I selected two male and two female freshmen from one section who exhibited problems of organization, focus, and logic in their writing. After obtaining their consent to participate in the project, I met with each of the participants to interview them about their previous writing experience.

The Writing Program

Students in the Writing Program attend writing classes for an hour and fifteen minutes twice a week. During a semester, students write and revise several expository essays on assigned topics, react and comment on other students' writing, and read and react to various published essays. Instructors also hold class discussions on revision strategies, style, and other writing problems that the students in a class might have. An important feature of the Program is the three stage draft process that the students go through when writing their

papers. The students in a section are divided into groups of four or five and after they have written their first drafts, they bring in their papers with copies for all the students in their group. The students then read their essays to the group, and the peers in turn comment orally and then write their comments on the copies. After the peer group meetings, the students use the comments they have received to write a second draft outside of class. Finally, the students use the instructor's comments to write a final draft which is typed and handed in for a grade.

During the semester in which the study was conducted, the research participants attended regularly scheduled classes and participated in classroom activities which included writing seven papers in a series of three drafts, and one in-class assignment. While I did follow the course outline of the Expository Writing Program, I deviated from the general procedures by not giving students specific assignments. Instead, I used a variety of techniques to stimulate them to think about topics for their papers. Thus, the students kept journals and from time to time I responded to their journal entries and suggested topics for their papers based on what they had written. Other sources of topics were writing inventories which students filled out at the beginning of the semester, and prewriting sessions in which students discussed a variety of topics they were interested in developing. In addition to not assigning topics, I did not give grades on the final drafts of the papers. Rather, at the end of the semester, I asked the students to choose five of their "published" pieces and hand them in to me so that I could give the students one composite grade.

Collection of the Data

In order to assess how teacher comments were affecting student writing, I asked the research participants to react aloud and tape record their reactions to the comments which appeared on the second drafts of their papers. Initially, I met individually with the research participants in my office and returned the second drafts of their first papers to them. I then asked the participants to read their papers aloud and when they came to a comment I had made to record their reaction to it. Before the participants started to record, I demonstrated what I wanted them to do by reading a comment from their papers and giving my reaction to it. During the recording session, I remained in the room and did not interfere with the taping except to remind the participants to react to each comment aloud. After the recording sessions were over, the participants took their second drafts home and revised their papers. They then typed final drafts and handed in all three drafts to me. The process described above was repeated five more times during the semester. However, for the remaining five papers, the participants reacted to my comments at home, and after revising their papers turned in all three drafts to me. At the end of the semester, the participants met individually with another instructor in the Expository Writing Program who interviewed them about their writing experiences during the semester and their views on teacher intervention during the writing process.

Analysis of the Data

The data that I analyzed consisted of the comments I had made on the research participants' papers, their perceptions of my comments,

and their reactions on the final drafts of their papers.

Teacher Comments

Since the categories of commenting in previous studies such as Kelley's were general in nature and not well defined, I developed my own taxonomy of teacher comments. The major categories of this taxonomy are explicit cues, implicit cues, and teacher corrections. Explicit cues are those in which the teacher indicates to the student exactly how s/he might revise his/her paper or points out a specific error to the student. Examples of explicit cues on the macro level are:

Conceptual Level

Substitution: Student writes a paper in which she discusses how she uses her imagination to cope with the monotony of riding the subway every day. One of her final lines is: "The faculty of the mind to conjure up adventures in order to deal with the monotony of routine is fascinating." Teacher comment intending that the student make a major conceptual change by changing the focus of the paper: You could expand your essay with (1) as your central idea and use the subway as one example. Other monotonous chores may come to mind. (1) refers to the sentence "The faculty of the mind..."

Structural Level

Rearrangement: Student writes a paper about his composing processes and has a paragraph near the end of the paper about when he writes his essays. Teacher comment intending that the student rearrange the paragraphs: You should put the last paragraph near the beginning where you set the scene for your composing processes.

Examples of explicit cues on the micro level are:

Sentential Level

Deletion: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on the sensual nature of monsters: "He has so many different parts about him that could turn a female on." Teacher comment intending that the student delete a phrase: The words 'about him' are unnecessary in the sentence and make it sound awkward. In your rewrite, I suggest that you delete 'about him' so that the sentence reads "He has so many different parts that could turn a female on."

Lexical Level

Substitution: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on juvenile delinquency: "Juveniles are thirty percent of the population but they constitute almost 50% of the crimes in the United States." Teacher comment intending that the student substitute a word: It does not make sense to say that juveniles constitute crimes. Try using 'commit' or 'are responsible for' and see what different meanings are conveyed when you substitute one of these words for the one you have written.

Grammar: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on the New York City blackout of 1977: "Finally, we drove out to Howard Beach, I spotted a church bazaar right before the toll booth to enter Rockaway." Teacher comment intending that the student change the punctuation: This is a comma splice.

Format Conventions

Spelling: Student writes the following sentence in a paper in which she compares life to a game of Monopoly: "The roll of the dice he controlls." Teacher comment intending that the student substitute the correct spelling of the word 'controlls': Spelling [Refers to the word 'controlls.']

Implicit cues are those in which the teacher calls attention to a problem, suggests alternative directions for the student to pursue, or questions the student about what s/he has written. Examples of implicit cues on the macro level are:

Conceptual Level

Addition: Student writes a paper in which she compares life to a game of Monopoly. She does not give enough examples to make her analogies vivid to the reader. Teacher comment intending that the student elaborate on her ideas: You apparently like to use analogies in your writing which is a good technique. Somehow this paper is a little abstract. Perhaps some concrete examples for your generalizations would help.

Structural Level

Substitution: Student writes a paper on the isolation people experience in New York City. Her concluding paragraph is about the suicide rate in this country. Teacher comment intending that she substitute another conclusion: Do you think your conclusion follows logically from the ideas you discuss in the body of your paper?

Examples of implicit cues on the micro level are:

Sentential Level

Deletion: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on the New York City blackout of 1977: "Most of the middle class citizens moved out of this area and moved to other places." Teacher comment intending that the student delete the phrase "and moved": This is awkward.

Lexical Level

Substitution: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on stereotypes which she calls "social chains": "Stereotypes not only enslave but reduce equality." Teacher comment intending that the student substitute another word for 'reduce': This word is inappropriate here. [Refers to 'reduce' in the sentence.]

Actual teacher corrections, the third category, includes the rearrangement, addition, and deletion of phrases and sentences, and the addition, deletion, and substitution of words in a paper.

Student Perceptions

I also categorized the perceptions of the research participants. Examples of these categories are:

Perceives teacher intention: Teacher writes "Is this the right word?" next to 'view' in the sentence "He'd view his apartment and punch the walls in frustration." Teacher's intention is for the student to substitute another word for 'view'. Student perceives teacher intention: "View is circled. 'Is this the right word?' I guess I could change that. Well, when you say he viewed his apartment, it sounded as if he's standing on top of a mountain looking down. It's not too clear, and I wasn't sure I was using the word in the right context."

Does not perceive teacher intention: Teacher writes "Do you like the way this sounds?" next to the sentence "All that is seen is a uniform and according to preconceived notions, he is a lacky." Teacher intention is for the student to change the sentence into active voice by substituting "all people see" for "all that is seen" so that the sentence reads "All people see is a uniform and according to preconceived notions, he is a lacky." Student does not perceive teacher intention: "You asked me do I like the way that sounds. Yeah, I like the way it sounds. Because I was talking about stereotypes and stereotypes are preconceived notions, and I thought that it sounded pretty good myself."

Explains own intention: Teacher writes "What do you mean?" next to the word 'impressionable' in the sentence "In him you can see the young impressionable of today as he will appear tomorrow." Participant explains own intention: You asked me what I meant

by 'impressionable.' What I meant was that here was a young man, a young person, who really hasn't had too many experiences and that he's looking at the world all wide-eyed and bushy-tailed and eager and that being as young and naive and unknowing as he is, he is very impressionable.

Suggests course of action: Teacher writes 'spelling' over the word "pandimonium" in the sentence "Now all out pandimonium broke out, people were raiding every store." Student suggests course of action: "You have that I spelled pandemonium wrong. You didn't correct it so I'll go to the dictionary and see if I can look it up and correct the spelling."

Student Actions

In addition to categorizing teacher comments and student perceptions, I developed a taxonomy of student actions on the final drafts of their compositions which includes categories on the macro and micro levels. Examples of student actions on the macro level are:

Conceptual Level

Addition: In the final draft of a paper on juvenile delinquency, the student discusses why juvenile offenders receive such light sentences, a new idea he had not written about in his previous draft.

Structural Level

Deletion: In a paper on the crisis in Iran, the student writes a paragraph about the Pope's role as an intermediary between the United States and Iran. In the final draft, he deletes this paragraph from the text.

Examples of student actions on the micro level are:

Sentential Level

Addition: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on stereotypes which she calls 'social

chains': "Why do these invisible chains refuse to judge a man 'by the content of his character not the color of his skin?'" In the final draft, the student adds the phrase 'the people who enforce' so that the sentence reads Why do the people who enforce these invisible chains refuse to judge a man 'by the content of his character not the color of his skin?'

Lexical Level

Substitution: Student writes the following sentence in a paper on a 'left-over hippie' from the 60's: "His life seemed to have ended in the last cycles of that era." In the final draft, the student substitutes 'years' for 'cycles' so that the new sentence reads His life seemed to have ended in the last years of that era.

Method of Analysis

Using these taxonomies, I coded each of the comments that I had written, the perceptions of the research participants, and their actions on their final drafts. When I coded my comments, I also wrote down the intention of each of them. For example:

Comment	Perception	Action
"This is a comma splice." Refers to "It was a warm July evening, my mother, father, and I had finished dinner and were deciding what we could do for that nights entertainment."	You have a comment that this is a comma splice.	Makes sentence into two sentences so that they read: "It was a warm July evening. My mother, father and I had finished dinner and were deciding what we could do for that nights entertainment."
EXPLICIT-SENTENCE-PHRASE GRAMMAR-TEACHER INTENTION-PUNCTUATION CHANGE	DIRECT RESPONSE-REREADS COMMENT	SENTENCE-PHRASE-GRAMMAR-PUNCTUATION CHANGE
	I'm not sure what a comma splice is	
	DIRECT RESPONSE-DOES NOT PERCEIVE TEACHER INTENTION	
	but I'll look it up in my little handbook.	
	DIRECT RESPONSE-SUGGESTS COURSE OF ACTION	

After coding the data, I correlated my comments on the second drafts of the research participants' papers with their actions on their final drafts and analyzed what changes if any, had been made as a result of my comments. The research participants' reactions were an important part of this analysis because they indicated whether the participants had understood the intentions of my comments and why they had made particular revisions.

On the macro level, I compared drafts to see whether as a result of my comments the research participants had made any structural changes in their paragraphs or in the text as a whole. Similarly, on the conceptual level, I compared drafts to see whether the participants had rearranged, deleted, or added ideas. On the micro level, I compared sentences and lexical items I had commented on in the second drafts with parallel sentences and lexical items in the final drafts in order to see what changes had been made. Another part of my analysis on the micro level concerned the corrections I had made on the research participants' papers. In order to analyze the effect of these comments, I compared the sentences and lexical items that I corrected in the second drafts with the parallel sentences and lexical items in the final drafts. The majority of my corrections concerned grammar, spelling, and punctuation and since I had also written explicit cues on the participants' papers pointing out errors in these areas, I was able to compare the research participants' responses and actions to teacher corrections and explicit cues on similar errors.

Using the results of my analysis of the effect of particular comments

on individual papers, I charted the patterns of responses and actions of each participant to particular categories of comments and compared the responses and actions of all participants across the various categories of comments on both the macro and micro levels.

Discussion and Results

An analysis of the data on the structural and conceptual levels indicated that the research participants, who were inexperienced revisers, responded favorably to explicit cues in which I gave them specific suggestions about how they could strengthen or reorganize the ideas they had already formulated in their papers. When students were still in the process of discovering what they were trying to say, explicit cues also helped them to make major conceptual revisions. Implicit cues, in which I questioned the participants about the ideas they had presented or suggested alternative directions for them to pursue, helped them to clarify their ideas or stimulated them to think about ways they could develop the topics for their papers. However, after they had found a direction for their papers, they still needed to make further revisions in order for them to be in "publishable" form. Thus, implicit cues were not effective in helping them to make major conceptual changes in their papers. Responding with these kinds of cues was appropriate however, when the participants presented well developed ideas or when I wanted to suggest alternative ideas for them to pursue in future papers.

On the sentential level, it was evident that my implicit cues were not helpful because the research participants frequently did not recog-

nize what the problems were in the sentences I had commented on and/or didn't have the strategies to revise them. Thus in response to cues such as "Can you rephrase this?" and "Rewrite this sentence" they either deleted the sentences, made no revisions in them, or wrote revisions which were just as awkward as their original sentences or did not fit into the context of the paper. On the lexical level, the research participants also did not respond favorably to my implicit cues. Indeed, one participant reacted to "wrong word" by substituting another inappropriate word in the sentence, and another participant reacted to "Is this the right word?" by challenging my comment and making no revision at all in her final draft.

The data also indicated that while the research participants readily accepted my corrections, they did not always understand why I had made such changes. For example, in one paper, a research participant wrote: "Remington is owned by DuPont, who is one of the wealthiest families in America and Standard Oil is owned by Rockefeller." I substituted the word "which" for "who" in the sentence and the writer commented:

> Okay, I have "Remington, who is owned by DuPont, who is one of the wealthiest." You changed the word "who" to "which is one of the wealthiest." Okay, I guess that's correct English. That's good. I appreciate that because, uh, I'm not sure when to use words like that.

Though in the final draft, he made the substitution I had indicated, in his next paper, he still did not know how to use relative pronouns. Thus he wrote "I quote Wolfgang and Cohen which states exactly what I would like to say." In this case, I substituted "who" for "which" and

crossed out the "s" in the word "states" so that the sentence read "I quote Wolfgang and Cohen who state exactly what I would like to say." The participant's response to my comment was "Okay, yeah, it doesn't sound right so I'll fix that up," and in the final draft, he wrote the corrected version of the sentence.

Another participant wrote this sentence in one of her papers:

> Instead of that innocent and naive look, his face clearly shows his experiences: from that speculative, glassy look in his eyes; to his nose that has been knocked out of joint in youth; to those hard, unyeilding lips, with their cynical smirk and that condescending leer.

I changed the semi-colons to commas in the sentence and the participant made the changes I had indicated in her final draft. In a later paper, she wrote:

> When one takes away the pride of a race by portraying it as second class citizens; when one race insults the dignity of another race by treating it in deed and manner as inferior; when one race displays blatant disregard of another by seeing it only through stereotypes; it not only takes equality but also freedom.

I again changed the semi-colon to commas and the participant questioned me about it:

> Then I say "when one takes away the pride of a race by portraying it as second class citizens" and then I use a semi-colon and then I say "when one race insults the dignity of another race by treating in deed and manner as inferior" and I use a semi-colon and "when one race displays blatant disregard of another by seeing it only through stereotypes" and I use a semi-colon. All those times you made my semi-colons commas and I'm not really sure why because I always thought that commas weren't right when a sentence was so long but you did it so I guess that I was wrong.

The participant's response and use of the semi-colon in this paper indicated that she had not learned anything about the use of semi-colons

from my corrections on her previous paper. From these examples it is evident that teacher corrections alone are not helpful kinds of comments because students frequently revise their papers according to the corrections without understanding why they have been made.

Along with being ineffective in helping students to understand their errors, teacher corrections reinforced the participants' perceptions of the writing process and the teacher's role in the process. Indeed, two of the participants viewed revision as a matter of correcting errors and had always looked upon the teacher as someone who would show them how to "fix up" their papers. Because the passive role they had played in the writing process, they preferred when I made the necessary corrections on their papers. Yet they and the other participants were capable of correcting their errors when I just wrote explicit cues on their papers in which I pointed out errors and left it to them to make the revisions. For example, when I wrote 'subject and verb do not agree' next to a sentence, the participants were able to correct this error. Likewise, when I wrote 'sp' over a misspelled word, the participants corrected their mistakes.

Implications for teaching and further research

Implications for teaching

What emerges from the analysis of the data on both the macro and micro levels are continua of commenting along which a teacher might respond to her students' writing. Thus on the macro level, it is apparent that students who are inexperienced revisers will respond favorably to explicit cues which indicate to them how they may strengthen the ideas

they have already presented in their papers. For example, teachers might write comments in which they suggest how students may rearrange paragraphs in a more logical order, elaborate on specific points in their papers, or add more examples to support generalizations they have made. If students are still in the process of discovering the topics for their papers, then explicit cues suggesting how they can make major conceptual changes can be helpful. When students become more experienced at revising, teachers may want to be less explicit in their comments and instead suggest alternative directions for them to pursue or question them about various aspects of the ideas they have presented in order to stimulate them to make conceptual changes. On the lexical and sentential levels, explicit cues may also be effective in helping inexperienced revisers during the writing process. Thus if a word choice is inappropriate, a teacher might suggest a number of alternative words that the student can use in place of the original one. On the sentential level, a teacher might respond to an awkward sentence by suggesting an alternative way of rewriting the sentence. It is also important to note that while explicit cues telling students why sentences are awkward may be helpful, such students may also need to listen to their sentences aloud so that they can hear why a sentence is awkward and to learn some stylistic options for revising such sentences.

Since the research participants' responses and subsequent actions on their final drafts indicated that teacher corrections did not help them to understand their errors, and that in fact they were capable of revising their papers if errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar were pointed out to them, teachers might refrain from correcting the

grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors in student papers and instead name the errors so that the students can make the necessary changes themselves.

It is evident that inexperienced revisers need specific directions from their teachers about how to revise their papers. However, at some point when students are more experienced revisers, teachers might move along the continua on both the macro and micro levels and write more implicit cues. The continua of commenting then, can be used as a guide for writing comments on student papers. Yet, the comments teachers write can only be helpful if they respond to student writing as part of an ongoing dialogue between themselves and their students.

In order to create such a dialogue, teachers might begin by responding to student writing not as evaluators and judges but as interested adults would react to such writing. For example, in response to one of the participant's papers I commented that after reading the paper I wasn't sure of the point he was trying to make in it. The participant's response to my comment indicated that his perception of himself as a writer was a poor one because he said: "I really didn't know what I was doing and you sort of told me you didn't know what my main topic was." In trying to help a student such as this one, teachers might comment in an encouraging and supportive manner instead of reinforcing the student's poor self-perception.

To further diffuse the student's perception that the teacher's role in the writing process is that of an evaluator, teachers might write comments on the final drafts of student papers encouraging them to pursue

further some of the ideas they have presented. For example, when a participant wrote a paper on a "left-over hippie," I suggested that she write another paper on the general problem of "left-over flower children." Though the writer chose not to pursue this idea, my comment indicated my interest in the idea she had presented, and encouraged her to think of me as a participant in a dialogue about her writing.

Another way teachers can help to create a dialogue with their students is for them to become more sensitive to the intentions of student writers. Indeed, as a result of my research, I became aware that I often did not perceive the intentions of the student's text but rather wrote comments reflecting my stylistic preferences or my own set of abstract notions of "correct writing." Thus in a paper on the blackout of '77, I commented to the participant that the referent of the word 'them' was unclear in the sentence "We rode by the movie theatres, read what was playing but none of them appealed to us." In this case, the participant had an implied antecedent in mind when he wrote 'them'; however, my comment did not take into account what his actual intentions were but rather reflected an abstract rule of "correct writing", i.e., "every pronoun must have an antecedent," that I was applying to the text.

In some cases, my comments reflected my stylistic preferences. For example, when one participant wrote "The budget crunch was felt by my school so they cut certain activities one of which was the track team," I commented "Rewrite the sentence" intending that he change the sentence into the active voice. It was evident that the participant's intention in the sentence was to emphasize the words "budget crunch" so the passive

voice was appropriate there. Because of my stylistic preferences, however, I did not consider his intentions and thus asked him to rewrite his sentence. The participant's paper on a "left-over hippie" had many slang expressions in it and when I questioned her on the use of "freaked out" for example, she responded:

> "Is this the right word?" Yes. I know it is slang but that's what I wanted to use. In the opening sentence I wanted in some way to give people an impression of what they were going to be reading just by using the word 'freaked' you know.

Here, my comment reflected my own stylistic preferences because I did not consider that slang would be appropriate in order to create a certain impression of the character the writer was describing.

Along with writing comments in a positive and empathic manner and becoming more sensitive to the intentions of student writers, teachers might try to find out whether their comments are having a favorable effect on their students. Using the taxonomies developed in this study, teachers can categorize their comments, correlate them with their students' actions on subsequent drafts, and then see what kinds of comments are being understood by their students. For example, if a teacher moves along the lexical continuum and writes a comment such as "Is this word appropriate here?" on several student papers, then she can correlate her comments with her students' actions on their final drafts and be able to see whether such a comment is being understood.

When creating a dialogue with their students, teachers might follow the suggestions that I have made. Teachers should be aware however that many students have never written papers in a series of drafts and therefore may not be receptive to such a process and to teacher comments dur-

ing the writing process. Thus one of the participants said in his final interview that at first he had reacted negatively to the idea of a draft process because he had been used to writing a paper once and handing it in to the teacher for a grade. Since students may have similar attitudes, teachers might discuss the value of revision and show their students samples of their own writing and revising processes. Teaching students the value of revision may help them to change their perceptions of their roles in the writing process. At the beginning of my study, the research participants rarely challenged my comments and preferred to play a passive role in the writing process. However, as a result of their experiences with teacher responses during the process, they began to change their attitudes and play a more active role. Thus all of the participants went beyond the intentions of my comments on either the macro or micro levels in papers that they wrote in the latter part of the semester. Indeed, a participant's remarks during her final interview indicated that her attitude toward teacher comments had changed and that she viewed her role in the writing process as a participant in a dialogue between herself and her teacher:

> I guess the reason teacher comments never really influenced me before was because I got fairly good ones. You know, before it was always a mark or a statement. The teachers never went into any big descriptions about your writing. If you fulfilled the task, you know, it was okay. Suddenly this year, I see it. I can question it. I can disagree with it. I can see, you know, the different aspects of it. That did make sense.

Suggestions for further research

Since little research has been done on the effect of particular comments on student writing, I decided to use the case study method and

explore the effect of my comments on the writing of four college freshmen. While the reactions to my comments and their actions on their final drafts did vary among the four research participants, it was possible to generalize about the effect of my comments on all four students. Thus, it was evident that they responded favorably to my explicit comments on the conceptual and structural levels. It was also apparent that they did not respond well to my implicit comments on the lexical and sentential levels, and therefore might respond more favorably to explicit cues on these levels. Based on the results of my study, I have hypothesized:

1. Students who are inexperienced revisers will improve on the structural and conceptual levels if they receive explicit cues about how to revise their papers.
2. Students who are inexperienced revisers will improve on the lexical and sentential levels if they receive explicit cues about how to revise their papers on these levels.

Using an experimental design, these hypotheses could be tested on a larger population. Because I have distinguished between two major types of comments, i.e., explicit and implicit, the comments that are written on papers in such a study could be closely controlled by the researcher. In addition to testing my hypotheses, researchers might also use the dimensions of composition annotation suggested by King (1979) as a guide for studying the effect of other types of comments on student writing. For example, research might be done to investigate student actions in response to whether the comment is interlinear, marginal, at the beginning/end, or on a rating form.

Although the analysis in this study concerned the changes that occurred between the drafts that the research participants turned in to me and their final drafts, they actually wrote three drafts. Thus, they got an initial response to their work from their peers and then wrote a second draft to which I responded. This progression of reactions was sometimes confusing to the participants because my responses often contradicted those of their peers. On the conceptual level for example, I often pointed out the lack of focus in a paper and suggested a major conceptual change in contrast to the peer group which had had a positive response to the idea that the participant had presented. Since the three stage draft process in which both peers and teachers respond to student writing is an integral part of many composition classrooms, the problem of how these two sets of responses interact with one another might also be the subject of future research projects.

Most of the previous research that has been done in the area of teacher response to student writing has been concerned with how teachers evaluate the finished products of student writing. The model of teacher response which emerges from such research is one in which the teacher's role is that of an evaluator who comments on the strengths and weaknesses of her students' papers. When a teacher writes her comments, the underlying assumption is that her students will respond to them and thus improve their writing performance. However, these implied dialogues rarely happen because students invariably look upon their teacher as a judge and consequently see themselves as participants in a "dialogue" in which they can do little but accept their teacher's criticisms. In

this study, I have suggested a different model of teacher response in which teachers are no longer evaluators and students are no longer passive recipients of their teachers' judgements. Instead, teachers have an effect on the immediate final products of student writing and through their supportive responses during the writing process, begin to establish an on-going dialogue in which both they and their students are active participants.

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